



gracefellowship

Series: Crossroads: Between Kingdom and Culture

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Title: All About Love

Passage: 1 Corinthians 13:1-13

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 13:1-13

Just out of curiosity, how many of you had 1 Corinthians 13 read in your wedding service? That's the place we most often see this passage used in our culture today. And it fits there, for sure- but I don't honestly think when Paul wrote these words he ever thought Christian weddings would center around these verses! Remember, in the larger context of this book and what Paul is addressing, he is talking about spiritual gifts and orderliness in worship. He has also been correcting people in the church at Corinth about the divisions that exist in the church. One of those divisions was found in the practice of spiritual gifts. It seems that there were people who had put special priority on certain gifts of the Spirit and they had downplayed others.

- If you spoke in tongues you were a rock star!
- If you could heal people you were put on a pedestal.
- If you were performing miracles you were next level amazing!
- If you had the gift of mercy or hospitality or wisdom...that was cute, but not special.

Last week we looked at Paul correcting the thinking of people who elevate certain gifts and downplay others. He talked about how we are all part of the same body and the same Spirit of God gives gifts to His children as He determines. And guess what, no part of the body is more important than another- you can't say to one part of your body, "I don't need you!" All the gifts the Spirit of God gives to the Church are important and useful. And because no one has all the gifts, we are dependent on other people who have gifts we lack to make us complete.

Then we left last week on a cliffhanger! Here's the last thing Paul said that we looked at last week

:: 1 Corinthians 12:31

³¹ Now eagerly desire the greater gifts.

And yet I will show you the most excellent way.

The Holy Spirit gives us gifts to use for the glory of God and the edification of the body of Christ. But how we use the gifts is important! So, Paul says, I want to show you the most excellent way to live as a person with God-given gifts to keep from slipping into this place of arrogance and division. And that's where we pick up today in Chapter 13.

:: 1 Corinthians 13:1-3

¹ If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal.

² If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing.

³ If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.

Here's the first thing I want you to write down this morning:

The most important thing a Christian can possess is God's love.

In English we have one word for love. Guess what it is: LOVE!

So we are limited in our expression of things when it comes to love. At lunch you might say, "Honey, I love you so much! This lunch is amazing! I love steak!" None of us think you love steak and love your spouse in the same way. But it's the language we have to express that sentiment.

In the Greek language the specific word Paul used here is "agape." It's a love that shows action. It's the love of God moving toward people. Agape love is not just discussed, it is demonstrated.

:: 1 John 4:7-9

⁷ Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God.

⁸ Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love.

⁹ This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him.

:: Romans 5:8

⁸ But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

One of my favorite parables Jesus told is the story of the prodigal son. But I learned something this week- that was a story that was already popular in Jesus' day, except for one thing- the ending. In the original story the son takes his inheritance from his father, squanders it and then returns home. When he sees his father and begs for forgiveness, the father rejects him and sends him away. The

moral of the story is that you get what you deserve and your actions have consequences. When Jesus tells the story to his audience, who are very familiar with the tale, he says when the son returned home and was still a long way off in the distance, the Father *ran* to him- that was an unacceptable thing for a man to do in that culture because it was undignified. But not only did the Father run to his son, he hugged him and kissed him and gave him new clothes and new shoes and a ring and he threw a party for the son who had treated him so badly.

Paul wants to emphasize to us as followers of Jesus that if we have incredible gifts but we don't demonstrate God's love in the use of them- we are nothing! He even uses the metaphor of being a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal! A well timed hit of the cymbal on a drum kit can be great and add to the music. But if someone is just pounding on the drums while you're talking and it's not in rhythm, it can be horrible! Paul says you can speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but if you don't use it abusively or you use your gift to manipulate or try to gain power, it's not useful at all and drives people away.

Who cares if you can move mountains or fathom all the worlds mysteries if it isn't backed up by love?

Love is the indispensable ingredient for each of the spiritual gifts. An omission of love will leave the use of our gifts deeply flawed.

The preeminent thing you will do in your life is love! It's not the exercising of your spiritual gifts. Jesus told his disciples that true and false prophets would come into the world. Do you remember how he said we could identify them? The fruit of their life. He didn't say we would know them by the powerful demonstration of their gifts; He said we would know them by their fruit! And guess what the first fruit of the Spirit is- Love!

Then Paul is kind enough to tell us what love is, or better yet, what love does, since love is demonstrated!

:: 1 Corinthians 13:4-7

⁴ Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud.

⁵ It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs.

⁶ Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth.

⁷ It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

Again, we often hold these verses up for the model of how we should love in our marriages: "As you love your spouse be patient. Be kind. Don't envy..." But this is not relegated to married love. This is how God wants us to love everyone around

us. But it is especially important to love this way in the Church as we all come together to use our giftings for the glory of God.

I've heard it said that one of the ways you can take a survey of your own spiritual growth is to put your name in the place of the word "love" and see where we stand and where we still fall short.

- Joel is patient
- Joel is kind
- Joel does not envy
- Joel does not boast
- Joel is not proud
- Joel does not dishonor others
- Joel is not self-seeking
- Joel is not easily angered
- Joel keeps no record of wrongs
- Joel does not delight in evil but rejoices in the truth
- Joel always protects, always hopes, always trusts, always perseveres

It definitely gives us something to shoot for and to see where we need to grow! I have a feeling if you are like me you may not have done very well on that test! Why is love so indispensable?

People will forget what you say, but they will remember how you treat them!

One of the hardest pills to swallow as a Pastor after all the hours I spend writing sermons and preaching messages is that you will forget most of what I say! But I hope you always remember if I'm kind to you, or I'm encouraging, if I honor you and rejoice in your well-being, or that I served you in some way.

But let's remember something we read a few minutes ago in 1 John: God is love! So these verses really let us know what God is like. We will all fall short when it comes to loving perfectly, but God won't!

- God is patient
- God is kind
- God does not envy
- God does not boast
- God is not proud
- God does not dishonor others
- God is not self-seeking
- God is not easily angered
- God keeps no record of wrongs
- God does not delight in evil but rejoices in the truth
- God always protects, always hopes, always trusts, always perseveres

I don't know what you think God is like in your mind's eye, but I want to encourage you to meditate on truth and replace any false notions with the reality of how God feels toward to you.

God is patient with you.
God is kind to you.
God is not easily angered by you.
God doesn't keep records of your wrong doings.

And here's why this conversation is important at this juncture of Paul's letter where he is talking with the church about spiritual gifts, look at verses 8-13.

:: 1 Corinthians 13:8-13

⁸ Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away.

⁹ For we know in part and we prophesy in part,

¹⁰ but when completeness comes, what is in part disappears.

¹¹ When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put the ways of childhood behind me.

¹² For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.

¹³ And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.

Paul tells us to keep the focus on love over and above our gifts because love will never fail- some of your translations may say "never end." But look what he says will end:

Prophecies will cease.

Tongues will be stilled.

Knowledge will pass away.

These things that the people in Corinth were putting so much pride in and being divisive over, Paul says all those things will go away. But love will never end! In fact, what we know right now is incomplete. We only see part of the big picture of what God is doing! This is the time for us to grow up when it comes to how we deal with one another in the body of Christ.

Right now we see spiritual things imperfectly. But a perfect understanding is coming!

Paul compares it to looking into a mirror and seeing a dim reflection. Here's what we have to understand about mirrors in that day and age- they didn't have glass mirrors like we have now. They had bronze or silver or gold that had been polished to a shine and had a reflective surface, but it still might have been distorted or offered a less than perfect view of the person looking into the mirror. That sounds like a lot of things we go through in life. We wish we saw things clearly, but everything feels murky.

What we see and know now is partial and incomplete. But hold on! Understanding is coming! Paul tells us a day is coming when we will know everything fully, even as we are fully known.

You know, there is a question that never goes away. It's asked in every civilization for all time. The question is "why?"

- Why did my loved one die?
- Why didn't I get the job when I was more qualified than the person who got it?
- Why are some people healed and others not?
- Why do evil people prosper?

Paul says a day is coming when we will see things the way God sees them and what we know in part now we will know fully then. But in the mean time we are supposed to move through this world in love. The greatest gift we have is love. In fact, Paul closes with this thought:

13. And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.

Have you ever wondered why love is considered greater than faith and hope?

- When we see Jesus face to face we won't need faith any more! Faith is unnecessary in heaven when we are with Jesus.
- When we step into God's presence we don't need hope any longer! Our hope is realized in the presence of the One who saved us!

Just like spiritual gifts will cease and love will remain, faith and hope will cease and love will remain. God is love and His love will be experienced by us forever. And we will love others perfectly in eternity.

It's great to have spiritual gifts. In fact, we are going to pick up next week with Paul encouraging the use of spiritual gifts. But showing God's love in tangible ways is more important. Use your gifts and demonstrate love.

Discussion Questions:

Read 1 Corinthians 13

Remind your group that Paul is discussing not only the spiritual gifts that exist in the church, but the abuse of those gifts.

1. What stands out to you the most from this passage?
2. How does Jesus demonstrate love to us? (Read John 15:12-13)
3. What might happen if we use the gifts we have been given without love as the motivating factor?
4. The description of love is demonstrated perfectly by God. How does love as described in this chapter compare to love as typically defined in our culture?

5. Take a moment to read verses 4-7 and then meditate for a few minutes on those things.
 - a. Which one of these things are you strong in? Where do you demonstrate love well and in a healthy way?
 - b. Which one of these things are you weak in? Where can you grow and mature in the way you demonstrate love?
6. What things does Paul say will change when we are with Jesus?
 - a. What happens to spiritual gifts?
 - b. What happens to faith and hope?
 - c. What happens to love?
7. How can we best demonstrate love to someone this week? Who needs to be loved by you?